

The Conservation Fund

Bunn's Lake Habitat Acquisition & Preservation Project

Project Description:

The Conservation Fund shall acquire in fee and transfer by donation 552 acres of forested wetlands known as Bunn's Lake to the National Park Service's Big Thicket National Preserve, to be permanently protected for water quality and wildlife habitat.

Bunn's Lake ("the Property") is located northeast of the City of Beaumont in Orange County, Texas, east of the Neches River and north of the current boundary of Big Thicket National Preserve. This preserve comprises one of the southernmost large expanses of forested wetlands on the Upper Coast, and is the first sizeable forest that migrating birds see as they finish their migration journey across the Gulf of Mexico in the spring. Coastal bottomland floodplain forests are not only important for many high priority breeding birds such as Wood Duck, Mallard, Hooded Merganser, Swallow-tailed Kite, Red-headed Woodpecker, Prothonotary Warbler and Bald Eagle, but are absolute necessities for landbirds during migration.

The Property is in the lower Neches River Basin near segments 0602 and 0607A, which currently do not support State water quality standards for lead, aluminum, and dissolved oxygen. Permanently protecting this wetland area will help remove these pollutants and improve water quality. As pollutants settle out via washover through these forests, they are immobilized, decomposed and absorbed back into the soil, instead of running off into the waterway.

Forested wetlands in southeast Texas are under severe strain from land fragmentation caused by urban and suburban expansion and short-term rotational timber harvest. Ensuring the permanent protection of this Property will offset the habitat impacts of clearing forests in surrounding areas, and will guarantee that vulnerable wintering and migration habitat will be available as southeast Texas continues to be more densely developed. Large blocks of forest wetland habitat in close proximity to a city of Beaumont's size are unusual and present an opportunity to permanently prevent land fragmentation in this ecosystem. This Property is valuable in terms of improving water quality on the Neches River through biofiltration, as wildlife habitat, and as a hurricane buffer for the City of Beaumont.

The Conservation Fund shall complete, at their own expense, all due diligence, appraisal, survey, environmental studies and title work for the Property prior to purchase. SEP Funds will not be used for the aforementioned expenses, since SEP Funds for this Project shall only be used for the purchase price of the Property and signage. If necessary, The Conservation Fund may purchase the Property in phases at their discretion. This Project includes purchase of any phase of the Property. Prior to purchasing any part of the Property, The Conservation Fund shall ensure that both the environmental and legal status of the Property meet the criteria of the National Park Service for donation as part of the Big Thicket National Preserve.

The Conservation Fund shall provide the SEP Program with a copy of the Property appraisal and closing documents for the Property purchase within two months of closing on the Property. Within 18 months of closing of the Property, The Conservation Fund shall transfer by donation ownership of the Property to the National Park Service for permanent protection as part of the Big Thicket National Preserve. The Conservation Fund shall work with the National Park Service to facilitate all processes involved in this transfer and provide documentation of the transfer to the SEP Program within two months of transfer. During the time that The Conservation Fund has ownership of the Property, prior to the Property's transfer to the National Park Service, The Conservation Fund shall ensure that the Property

is maintained in the condition in which it was acquired and managed to protect its conservation values.

Prior to transfer of the Property, The Conservation Fund shall purchase and install a weatherproof permanent sign at the entrance to the Property that describes the Project and includes the following language: "Performed with penalty monies from a Texas Commission on Environmental Quality enforcement action."

Environmental Benefit:

Acquiring and permanently protecting the Bunn's Lake tract will prevent pollution, reduce the amount of pollutants reaching the environment, and enhance the quality of the environment. These slow-moving backwater bayous contain a structural diversity and high biomass of standing vegetation, and surface litter material that provides refuge and a food source for many animals. This community provides habitat for wintering, migration and breeding birds including waterfowl, wading birds, and shorebirds. Permanently protecting this land will improve water quality, prevent fragmentation, and protect this large expanse of open space, wildlife habitat, and forestland for local communities and tourists alike.

Eligible Areas and Counties:

This project may receive contributions from the following:

Neches River Basin and Gulf Coast Aquifer including Anderson, Angelina, Aransas, Atascosa, Austin, Bee, Brazoria, Brazos, Brooks, Calhoun, Cameron, Chambers, Cherokee, Colorado, Dewitt, Duval, Fayette, Fort Bend, Galveston, Goliad, Gonzales, Grimes, Hardin, Harris, Henderson, Hidalgo, Houston, Jackson, Jasper, Jefferson, Jim Hogg, Jim Wells, Karnes, Kenedy, Kleberg, Lavaca, Liberty, Live Oak, Matagorda, McMullen, Montgomery, Nacogdoches, Newton, Nueces, Orange, Polk, Refugio, Rusk, Sabine, San Jacinto, San Augustine, San Patricio, Shelby, Smith, Starr, Trinity, Tyler, Van Zandt, Victoria, Walker, Waller, Washington, Webb, Wharton, Willacy and Zapata Counties.

Minimum Contribution Amount:

\$1,000